

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Congressman Jeff Fortenberry's Furthering International Nuclear Safety Act of 2011 (H.R. 1326) was advanced today by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The bipartisan bill, which now will be sent for a vote by the full U.S. House of Representatives, would enhance global cooperation on nuclear safety in light of the continuing nuclear reactor crisis in Japan that followed last month's tragic earthquake and tsunami.

"We can all agree that the world's current fleet of nuclear power reactors should be operated as safely as possible," said Fortenberry. "The United States, and other countries using nuclear power, can learn much from Japan's nuclear crisis and work to ensure that nothing like it happens again. This legislation can help achieve that important goal. Humanity cannot afford the costs of failure."

H.R. 1326 directs the State Department to use and strengthen existing mechanisms for the international sharing of nuclear safety information and best practices—mechanisms that were created by the Convention on Nuclear Safety of 1994. The United States joined that international agreement in 1999, and today almost all countries with operating nuclear power plants now belong to it. The U.S. Government Accountability Office issued an April 2010 report that highlighted the importance of the Convention in ongoing efforts to improve nuclear safety globally.

In particular, the bill would require the United States Representative to the Convention on Nuclear Safety to strongly encourage countries that have or are considering a civilian nuclear power program to join the Convention, as well as promote the standardization and increased use of performance metrics for countries to assess their own nuclear safety progress. It would also encourage greater public availability of information regarding nuclear safety efforts, standard practices for providing accurate and timely information regarding nuclear accidents and for the cooperative development of emergency response plans, and expanded cooperation on prediction and analysis capability for earthquakes, tsunamis, and on radiation as it is transported away from nuclear sites. Additionally, it would require the Executive Branch to craft a strategic plan for greater international cooperation on nuclear power safety, and to report to the Congress on the implementation of that plan, as well as on the status of achieving the actions set forth in the bill.

Fortenberry is a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and a co-founder of the Congressional Nuclear Security Caucus.

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